

30869/P

A

S E R M O N,

ETC.

G. WOODFALL, ANGEL COURT, SKINNER STREET, LONDON.

47160

A

SERMON,

on Matt. xviii. 11

PREACHED AT

THE MAGDALEN HOSPITAL,

BEFORE

THE PRESIDENT,

VICE-PRESIDENTS, TREASURER, COMMITTEE,
AND THE REST OF THE GOVERNORS

OF THE INSTITUTION,

ON TUESDAY, 23RD OF APRIL, 1833,

BY THE RIGHT REV. THE

LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN.

PRINTED AT THE REQUEST OF THE COMMITTEE.

LONDON:

J. G. AND F. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD,
AND WATERLOO PLACE;
AND HATCHARD AND SON, PICCADILLY.

1833.

Kate Webb



A

S E R M O N,

ETC.

MATTHEW, XVIII. 11.

FOR THE SON OF MAN IS COME TO SAVE THAT WHICH
WAS LOST.

THESE few words declare the whole scope and design of the Gospel dispensation. The Son of Man came to save that which was lost; and that which was lost was the human race. Viewed with reference to its religious condition, the whole world at the time of our Blessed Lord's advent was divided into two classes, Jews and Gentiles. The former, God had been pleased to separate from all the other nations of the earth in order to preserve the knowledge of himself, and of the service which he required from his intelligent

creatures. He had given them statutes and judgments, of which he had declared that, if a man do them, he shall live in them. But they had broken his covenant and had erred from his commandments. Though cured by their severe national calamities of that proneness to idolatry, which had been their besetting sin during the earlier periods of their history, they had entirely lost sight of the spiritual character of their law; and placing the whole of piety in a scrupulous observance of rites and ceremonies, while they clung fondly to the form, neglected the substance of religion.

The situation of the Gentiles was still more desperate. The common people were the slaves of superstition, bowing the knee to idols, the work of man's hands, worshipping deities whom they believed to be of like passions, and lusts, and vices, with themselves; while the powerful and learned, the statesman and philosopher inwardly despising, but from motives of policy outwardly complying

with the national religion, either wholly disbelieved the existence of a moral Governor of the universe, and of a future state; or if they believed, their belief was of so indistinct and wavering a character, that it produced no effect upon their life and conversation. Some there might be among the Jews, who, like Simeon and Anna, were just and devout, and anxiously looked for the consolation of Israel. Some there might be among the Gentiles, who, like Cornelius, disgusted with the superstitions and abominations of idolatry, and finding no satisfaction to their minds in the endless disputations of the philosophers, had been led by a merciful Providence to the knowledge of the Jewish scriptures, and had there learned, together with their households, to fear and worship the one true God. But with the exception of these few who had caught some glimpses of the light, all mankind lay immersed in the deepest spiritual darkness. To save a world thus lost, the Son of Man appeared on earth.

He came not merely to confirm the revelation, contained in the Jewish scriptures, of the one true God, the Creator, the Preserver, the Moral Governor of the Universe; not merely to enforce the truth, which had so repeatedly, though so fruitlessly, been inculcated on the people of Israel by their prophets, that the way to restoration to the favour of God lay through repentance; but he came, by the atonement which he made upon the Cross, to confer upon our repentance an efficacy which, of itself, it could not possess; to assure us by his resurrection from the dead of the sufficiency of that atonement, as well as of our own future resurrection; and having redeemed us from the penalties, to deliver us, also, from the power of sin, by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; he came, in a word, to repair all the mischief which had been brought upon the world by the disobedience of our first parents. The Jews, mistaking the purport of their prophecies, looked for a temporal deliverer; a

deliverer, who should not only restore their national independence, but subdue all the nations of the earth beneath their feet. But the redemption conferred by the Son of Man was a moral redemption. He came, as the angel had announced to Joseph, to save his people from their sins.

The religious aspect of the world, at the present time, is doubtless very different from that which it bore at the time of our Saviour's birth. The glory of the Lord has dispelled the thick darkness which then covered far the larger portion of the earth: the Gentiles have come to its light, and kings to the brightness of its rising. From the day on which Christ commissioned his Apostles to preach the Gospel to all nations, it has been diffusing itself with greater or less rapidity, and reducing the empire of idolatry within narrower limits; and never perhaps had the Christian stronger ground than at the present moment, for entertaining the opinion that the superstitions of heathenism in every quar-

ter of the globe are fast hastening to decay. Should, however, this consummation so devoutly to be wished, take place—should the faith of Christ at length be professed by all the nations of the earth, still the words of the text would remain as strictly applicable as they were at the first promulgation of the Gospel. The message of the Preacher would be still what the message of the Apostles was—the message of salvation to a lost world.

We call Christ our Saviour, and if we attach any definite meaning to the words which we utter, we must intend, at the same time, to express our consciousness of the existence of some danger to which we are exposed, and from which he delivers us. That our lot has been cast in a land on which the Sun of Righteousness has arisen; that in our infancy we were incorporated into the visible church of Christ; that instead of being bred up in the errors of Polytheism, we have had access to the sources of divine knowledge, to the oracles of God:—these are,

doubtless, privileges—inaluable privileges—and demand on our part the warmest returns of gratitude and thankfulness. But we shall entertain a very inadequate and unworthy conception of the deliverance which has been effected for us, if we limit it to the communication of these external privileges. It implies an internal change; an effect on the soul similar to that produced by the breath of God on the dust out of which Adam was formed—a quickening of that which before was dead. It can be duly appreciated only by those who, by strict and impartial self-examination, by careful observation of the workings of their own hearts, have been feelingly convinced that the natural man is dead in trespasses and sins; and must, if he depended solely on his own powers, for ever remain so. When we once feel that we are lost; when we are brought to a just sense of our inward corruption and weakness, then we begin to form a correct estimate of the value of the atonement which has been made for

us; then we become really desirous to appropriate to ourselves its benefits. The careless indifference in which we before lived, gives place to an anxious eagerness to embrace the offer of Divine grace, and to a corresponding solicitude, lest by any neglect or transgression, we should incapacitate ourselves to receive it. We begin to maintain a scrupulous watchfulness over our actions, our words, our thoughts; we continue earnestly and steadfastly in prayer; our faith in the Divine promises daily acquires new strength, and enables us to triumph over the world and its seductions. Thus that pure and holy character is gradually formed within us, which alone can fit us for admission into the kingdom of heaven. Thus the Lord accomplishes in us the work which he came on earth to perform, and saves that which was lost.

The first feelings excited in the mind, when it is awakened to a sense of its lost condition, are those of humiliation and fear. Convinced of sin, we are overwhelmed with

shame and confusion ; and like our first parents, would gladly hide ourselves from the presence of God ; we would say to the mountains, cover us ; and to the hills, fall upon us. At first we can scarcely believe that our salvation is possible. But as the scheme of redemption opens on our view, and reveals to us the dignity and faithfulness of Him who came to save that which was lost, our spirit revives within us. Faith takes the place of Doubt, and Hope of Fear. We taste that the Lord is gracious ; we are penetrated with admiration of his boundless love towards us, and reciprocal feelings of love are kindled within our bosoms. We love him because he first loved us ; and find in the love which we bear to him, an additional incentive to love our brethren. Hitherto our love towards them has rested on the relation in which we stand to them as offspring of a common parent. We now regard them under a new relation, as partakers of a common redemption ; we love them because they are

the objects of Christ's love. Not only do we testify our love towards them by the relief of their temporal wants; but we watch for their eternal welfare. The future destiny of those for whom Christ died, cannot be to us a matter of indifference. The same mind will be in us which was in Him. Our solicitude will be to constitute ourselves instruments in his hands of saving that which is in danger of being lost. The spectacle, which will excite our liveliest compassion, will be that of a fellow creature who has yielded to the seductions of the Tempter; but is struggling to extricate himself from his toils, and to return into the paths of righteousness. Every consideration of his faults will be absorbed in that of the peril to which he is exposed. We shall see in him only a brother who is about to perish, and whom it is our duty to save. We shall hasten to his assistance, and draw him back from the precipice on which he is standing, and speak the words of comfort and encouragement to his soul; we shall

confirm his rising purposes of amendment, and remove every obstacle which can impede his endeavours to carry them into effect. So long as the Christian sojourns in this vale of tears, in which the sad history of the transgression of the parents of the human race is daily and hourly receiving fresh illustration from the frailties and errors and crimes of their posterity, occasions will never be wanting to call forth the compassionate feelings which we have been describing. The difficulty is, not to discover fit objects for their exercise, but to select the most urgent cases from the multitude which on all sides present themselves. This, however, we may confidently affirm, that among the thousands who are now gathering the bitter fruits of their deviations from the path of virtue, none can with greater accuracy be denominated lost, none appear to be more entirely bereft of the means of recovery from their fall, than the unhappy females for whose benefit the Institution, of which we are now met to come-

morate the foundation, is designed. The Almighty Governor of the universe has appointed misery to be the never-failing attendant upon sin. Pain and sorrow entered into the world by sin; but in the present life the connexion is not always discernible; the punishment does not always follow closely upon the offence; on the contrary, the wicked are often seen to prosper in their wickedness; they increase in riches and power, and come not into trouble like other men; in many cases they go on even to the end of their days without experiencing any severe affliction, or being visited, as far as we can judge from outward appearances, with the displeasure of the Most High. He, for wise purposes, permits these instances of prosperous wickedness, in order to prove the faith of his servants, to teach them that they are only pilgrims and sojourners upon earth, and must look for their reward in that future state in which all seeming irregularities in the ways of His Providence will be removed, and it

will be clearly seen that His throne is established in justice and judgment. But whatever may be the case with other transgressors of the laws of God, when a female strays from the paths of virtue, the punishment is immediately consequent upon the offence. The effect of every criminal act, unless the mind has been rendered callous by inveterate habits of sin, is to lower him who commits it in his own estimation, and to dispose him to avoid the society of those with whom he formerly lived. He is conscious that he has done that which gives them a superiority over him, and lays him at any moment open to contumelious remark. This sense of degradation is the painful and never-failing companion of guilt; but it haunts incessantly the female who has violated the laws of chastity, and embitters every moment of her existence. She knows that as soon as her shame shall be published, the finger of scorn will be pointed at her—that she will be shunned by her former companions—and that even they who still

retain sentiments of affection for her, will be fearful to lend her any countenance, lest they should themselves incur the suspicions of a censorious world. She already sees herself the object of malicious sneers or pretended pity; she sees the mingled expression of sorrow and reproof in the looks of her kindred on whom she has brought disgrace; she hears her parents, of whom she once constituted the happiness and the pride, bewailing the miserable result of all their fond anxieties and labours, and wishing in the bitterness of their grief that she had never seen the light. Her mind reverts to the days of her innocence when she was a stranger to disquietude and remorse—when all the world seemed to smile upon her,—and the contrast with the present distracted state of her bosom, and the thick gloom which envelopes her future prospects, becomes too painful to be contemplated. The dreadful nature of this internal conflict manifests itself in the fatal acts to which it too often drives the unhappy sufferer,

in the destruction of herself, or of her innocent offspring. All her better affections are stifled, all her thoughts absorbed in the single desire of escaping the disgrace which awaits her. She, who but a few months back, would have shrunk from inflicting the slightest pain on a fellow creature, scruples not, in order to obliterate the evidence of her guilt, deliberately to destroy the infant to whom she has just given birth. Such is the dreadful operation of the loss of chastity on sensitive minds. On females of a coarser character, it produces a different effect. Knowing that the world is no longer their friend, they repay what they deem its harshness and injustice with resentment and hostility; outcasts from society, they feel themselves emancipated from its decent restraints; avoided by the virtuous of their own sex, they wreak their vengeance upon it by becoming instruments to betray the young and inexperienced, and to plunge them into the same depths of vice and misery into which they have themselves fallen; they

harden themselves in guilt; they glory in their shame, and are brought at length to the fearful state described by the Apostle when they are so entirely given up to a reprobate mind, that they seem to court perdition.

Still let the whole truth be stated. The charge of injustice, which these unhappy females urge against the world, carries with it at least the appearance of reason. They have for the most part been beguiled into their first deviation from the paths of virtue by the artifices of man. According as their minds have in their early years been more or less deeply imbued with virtuous principles, they may have opposed a greater or less resistance to the assaults of the seducer; but in almost every instance they have been the victims of seduction. Yet how different their fate from that of him who has tempted them to evil! While they are driven from society, shunned as if they bore about with them a moral pestilence, as if every good affection was extinguished within them, debarred all opportu-

nities of procuring a subsistence by honest exertions, consigned, in a word, to infamy and want; he who has been the author of their ruin feels no portion of the ills which he has brought upon them. The world frowns not on him; no face is averted from him; no door is closed against him; his worldly fortunes sustain no injury. The Scripture gives no sanction to this difference of treatment; it makes no distinction between the guilt of the man and of the woman; it says not that the tempter shall find admission into the Kingdom of Heaven, while the wretched victim of temptation shall be excluded. Can we then be surprised that these unhappy females regard with bitter hostility the world which deals so partially with them? which visits them with the severest chastisement, while it spares the companion, or rather the instigator of their transgression?

Harsh, however, and unjust as the procedure of the world may at first sight appear, it would be ill exchanged for systematic

lenity and indulgence towards female frailty. The purity of the female character is, under Providence, the great safeguard of national morals. Its powerful, though gentle influence is beautifully described by the Apostle, when he says that husbands, yet unconverted to the gospel, might be won by the conversation of their wives, whose chaste conversation they observed coupled with fear. Not only does vice stand rebuked in the presence of a virtuous woman; but they who are in the daily habit of conversing with her can scarcely fail to imbibe some portion of her purity of thoughts and affections. Nor is her influence confined to the immediate circle in which she moves; it extends even to future generations. On her, in the course of nature, necessarily devolves the care of the child in his tender years; she watches the gradual development of his faculties and passions; by her the first seeds of knowledge are sown in his mind; from her he derives his first principles of action; she forms, if I may so speak, the mould

in which his character is cast, and stamps on it an impression which, in after-life, is rarely effaced. The nearest approach to moral excellence which human nature, unassisted by revelation, ever made, was perhaps exhibited in the character of the Roman matron. When we reflect upon the qualities which conspired to form it; the union of lofty thought and stedfast purpose, and generous disdain of all that is mean and grovelling, with the nice sense and faithful discharge of every domestic duty, we cease to wonder that the children of such mothers became the masters of the world. Whatever tends to elevate the standard of female character, by drawing, as it were, a hallowed circle around the virtuous, and thus securing them even from the possibility of contact with impurity, cannot but be of essential importance to the well-being of society, and ought to be preserved with jealous care and vigilance.

But if regard to the purity of public morals forbids us to relax the stern decree which

fixes a mark of exclusion on the unhappy victim of seduction, surely the same regard demands that the seducer, though human laws inflict no penalty on his offence, should be made to feel that he has forfeited the esteem of those, whose esteem alone is valuable. Their altered looks and demeanour, by certifying him of the sentence of condemnation which they have passed upon his conduct here, may perchance awaken him to the terrors of the more righteous judgment which awaits him hereafter. Should it be thought that our blessed Lord by his gentle rebuke of the woman taken in adultery, intended to sanction a more lenient course in the treatment of female frailty, a reference to the circumstances under which He spoke will satisfy us, that we shall err in drawing such a conclusion from His words. The design of the Scribes and Pharisees who brought the unhappy woman into the Temple, was to entrap Him into the commission of some act which might furnish matter of accusation

against Him. Whatever decision He had pronounced upon her case, would probably have enabled them to impute to Him an improper assumption of the powers of the civil magistrate. He, therefore, so framed His answer, as at once to frustrate their malicious purpose, and, by reminding them of their own sins, to make them feel their peculiar unfitness to undertake the office of accusing others. But though He refused to pronounce a judicial sentence on the accused female, He suffered her not to depart unrebuked. By enjoining her to sin no more, He at once declared to her that she had already sinned; and warned her not to expose herself by a repetition of the offence, to the punishment which she had deserved and had so narrowly escaped.

But the very necessity on which we insist of rigorously excluding the female who has violated the laws of chastity, from the society of the virtuous of her own sex, ought to operate as an additional motive to induce us to look upon her with an eye of compassion.

The more forlorn and destitute her condition—the more truly it may be said of her that she is lost—the more incumbent is it upon us to use our utmost endeavours to save her—to snatch her from the destruction to which she is hastening—to afford her a chance of recovery, a place of repentance. Such a place is provided for her in the Institution of which I am this day the advocate. Avoided by all who have a regard to their own character, and thus cut off from the opportunity of supporting herself by honest industry—pursued by the reproaches of her own conscience—she seems to have no course open to her but to plunge more deeply into sin, in order to remove the immediate pressure of want, and to escape from the bitter sense of her own degradation. The world is not her friend; far from holding out to her any encouragement to return to the paths of virtue, it rather repels her, and by its unkindness prevents the better thoughts and feelings which may, from time to time, arise in her bosom,

from ripening into settled purposes of amendment. But here, within these walls, all that she sees and hears will tend to call forth and foster good resolutions, and to restore her peace of mind ; here she will be exposed to no ill-natured taunts, to no harsh and uncharitable reflections. Here she will be brought by the religious instruction which she will receive, to a just sense of her past misconduct, and to a knowledge of the only medium through which she can obtain pardon. She will mourn, deeply and sincerely mourn, over her transgressions ; but her sorrow will be that godly sorrow which leadeth to repentance not to be repented of. Thus she will be gradually fitted to return to the world, to act with credit the humble part allotted her, and to efface, by the consistent purity of her future life, the remembrance of her early errors.

Our country abounds with charitable Institutions, all proposing to themselves praiseworthy objects—all calculated, in a

greater or less degree, to promote the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind; but the especial design of the Institution of which I am now pleading the cause, is to accomplish the end for which the Son of Man came into this world—to save that which was lost. To the Christian then, who feels that but for the wondrous work of love by which the redemption of fallen man was effected, he must himself have inevitably perished, this Institution cannot surely appeal in vain.

On the wealthy inhabitants of this vast metropolis, it possesses an especial claim. The lax state of public morals, to which the fall of the unhappy females who find a refuge in this Asylum is to be traced, is in a great measure the result of the luxurious habits engendered by commercial opulence. The possession of wealth necessarily implies corresponding obligations on the part of the possessor. Among those obligations no one can be stronger than that of remedying the evils which wealth produces ; and among the

evils produced by wealth, none are of a character more pernicious, either to the individual sufferer or to the community in general, than those which it is the design of this Institution to alleviate.

Should any, before they bestow their bounty, be disposed to ask whether the beneficial purposes which the Founders of the Institution contemplated have been accomplished, we blame not the caution which prompts the enquiry, though when even a chance is presented of saving a lost soul, we scarcely think that a Christian is at liberty to hesitate. But in this respect also, the Asylum is able to establish an indisputable claim to public support. Of the unfortunate females, who have been received into it since its foundation, two-thirds have been reclaimed, and have become respectable members of Society.

What now remains, but to invoke the Divine Blessing on the work of charity in which we are this day engaged? to pray that they who give may be influenced in giving

by Christian motives—by a sincere desire to make themselves instruments in the hands of God, of promoting the end for which His blessed Son came in the flesh—the salvation of that which was lost; and that they who are the objects of our bounty, may receive it as the means appointed by a merciful God, to rescue them from perdition—so that from their admission within these walls, they may date the commencement of a new course of life, the entire renunciation of the sinful practices and habits to which they were for a time enslaved, and the future dedication of all the faculties of their souls and bodies to the service of their Redeemer.



